

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Canceled)
2. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim + 9, wherein the pasteurization apparatus is selected from the group consisting of an impingement oven, a steam tunnel, an ultra violet light tunnel, and radurization equipment.
3. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim + 9, further comprising:  
  
chilling the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.
4. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim + 9, further comprising:  
  
aseptically packaging the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.
5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 5 9, wherein the potato pieces packaged in a clean room environment have a shelf life of at least 60 days at refrigerated temperatures.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the steps of:

obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces;

storing the frozen par-fried potato pieces; ~~and~~

surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an exit into a clean room environment, the surface pasteurizing providing at least one final microbial count selected from the group consisting of:

less than 1.0-3.0 log CFU/g aerobic plate count;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g coliforms;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Escherchia coli*;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Staphylococcus aureus*;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g molds; and

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g yeasts;

wherein the potato pieces are negative for *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella*, *Clostridium botulinum*, *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, and *Staphylococcus aureus*; and  
packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.

wherein the modified atmosphere includes from about ~~0%~~ 2.5% to about 5.0% O<sub>2</sub>,  
from about 0% to about 15.0% CO<sub>2</sub>, and from about 0% to about 80% N<sub>2</sub>.

8. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 5 9, wherein the modified atmosphere includes ~~food grade oxygen, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen,~~ argon, sulfur dioxide, and mixtures thereof.

9. (Currently Amended) A method ~~in accordance with Claim 8~~ of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the steps of:  
obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces;  
storing the frozen par-fried potato pieces;  
surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an exit into a clean room environment; and  
packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces,

wherein the modified atmosphere includes from about ~~0%~~ 2.5% to about 5.0% O<sub>2</sub>, from about 0% to about 15.0% CO<sub>2</sub>, and from about 0% to about 80% N<sub>2</sub>.

10. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein the modified atmosphere includes 80% nitrogen, 10-15% carbon dioxide, and ~~0-5%~~ 5% oxygen.

11. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 9, wherein the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces is subsequent to the step of storing the frozen par fried potato pieces.

12. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 9, wherein the step of obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces includes lowering a temperature of the par-fried potato pieces to less than 24 °F.

13. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 9, further comprising transporting the frozen par fried potato pieces from a first location where the step of obtaining frozen par, fried potato pieces occurs to a second location where the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces occurs, the second location off-site from the first location.

14. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 9, wherein the method manages the inventory of French fried potatoes having an extended shelf life at a refrigerated temperature and having a reduced reconstitution time.